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## ART. VI. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*. By A. H. LEONOWENS. Boston : Fields, Osgood, & Co. 1870. pp. viii, 321.

THE writer of this book had certainly extraordinary advantages for seeing this most interesting country. She was invited there by the king to undertake the education of his children. This was no light task. His family was very large, and the children were eighty-one in number. With a keen foresight of the possible dangers of the step he was taking, he said to her in his letter of invitation : “ We hope that in doing your education on us and on our children (whom English call inhabitants of benighted land), you will do your best endeavor for knowledge of English language, science, and literature, and not for conversion to Christianity ; as the followers of Buddha are mostly aware of the powerfulness of truth and virtue, as well as the followers of Christ, and are desirous to have facility of English language and literature, more than new religions.” Mrs. Leonowens, on reaching Siam, experienced many difficulties, which seem to have arisen from the impossibility of agreement between a self-reliant Englishwoman and the despotic king of a land where the women are no more than ornaments of a harem. Still, in spite of continual bickerings, she seems to have rather got the better of his Majesty, and in the position of secretary, to have made herself useful to him in more glorious ways than that of simply teaching his wives and children English. All through her book we see that the whole country is judged from a rather petty point of view ; it is a semi-barbarian royalty and another civilization judged by commonplace respectability. Perhaps the book is all the more valuable on this account, her continual surprise at the shiftless civilization of the country, so different from the practical training of our every-day life, and her ill-concealed horror at it all, give us a much more vivid idea of the land than any enthusiastic descriptions which veil half the truth. Her view is like that of a carpenter, who, having seen nothing but American wooden houses, might be shown the Cambodian temple. If he used his eyes at all, if he were an intelligent man, he would give us an interesting account of it, but scarcely a sympathizing one. Her account is written, it must be said, in a very careless way, and we are treated to a great many more descriptions of her mental anguish, and of the tears of her child, whom she always calls “ Boy,” than are interesting in a book upon Siam ; but it is a common failing of travellers to forget that the selfish public only cares for that which is new and

strange in books of travel, and that the domestic sufferings of the writer are apt to prove uninteresting reading. In spite, however, of its literary faults, the book is both entertaining and valuable. It is not every traveller who sees just that side of Eastern society which Mrs. Leonowens depicts in this book. It was a curious and rare experience to teach English out of Webster's spelling-books to these thoughtless slaves, who the next day might lie in a prison at the caprice of the king. Such a story is that of "Hidden Perfume," a story which makes us regret that Mrs. Leonowens did not copy more. The king she seems to have seen in especially unfavorable light. Indeed, this keen-tongued governess must have seemed to him like a terrible and ever-present judge over all his actions. She must have represented to him the enlightened voice of the nineteenth century, and must have appeared as a sort of incarnate Mrs. Grundy, well calculated to make him doubtful of the advantages of Western civilization. We see him a statesman and philosopher to the public, but at home he was a domestic tyrant, — and a domestic tyrant in a country where the women are under lock and key is a monster that the most ardent reformers of hereabouts can never imagine. So that in regarding him we should distinguish his double life. We will not attempt to apologize for him in his private life, except by quoting his own defence against the attacks of an English newspaper published in Siam, "that when the Recorder (the paper) shall have dissuaded princes and noblemen from offering their daughters to the king as wives and concubines, the king will cease to receive contributions of women in that capacity." He was a warm student of the West, and an intelligent one, and he shows a freedom from prejudice, and an earnest desire for improvement that is very rare among rulers of any country. There is something painfully touching even in his ludicrous pedantry; for the poor man would at times have a missionary sent for, from miles away, to decide whether *murky* was not a better word than *obscure* or *gloomily dark*, or some such trifle. A touching story is that of his little daughter Fâ-Sing, who died of cholera when only eight years old. In a long circular which the king wrote about her, he said: "The sudden death of the said most affectionate and lamented royal daughter has caused greater regret and sorrow to her Royal father than several losses sustained by him before, as this beloved Royal amiable daughter was brought up almost by the hands of His Majesty himself, since she was aged only 4 to 5 months, His Majesty has carried her to and fro by his hand and on the lap and placed her by his side in every one of the Royal seats, where ever he went; whatever could be done in the way of nursing His Majesty has done himself, by feeding her with milk

obtained from her nurse, and sometimes with the milk of the cow, goat &c., poured in a teacup from which His Majesty fed her by means of a spoon" (cannot one forgive the king a great deal after that?) "so this Royal daughter was as familiar with her father in her infancy as with her nurses." It is just such insights into the king's life as this that give the book its charm. Another entertaining chapter is that upon the white elephant. The Buddhists, who believe in the transmigration of souls, imagine that this animal, which is especially rare, contains the soul of some great man, and on finding one they cover him with gold, and lavish every attention upon him. This is but a logical sequence of their most logical religion. One was caught during Mrs. Leonowens's stay in Siam, but he died before he reached the capital, where a palace was building to receive him. The king on learning it (no one dared tell him, but they broke the news to him by tearing down the palace intended for the elephant) burst into tears. He consoled himself, however, by writing the following description of the animal: "His (that is, the elephant's) eyes were light blue, surrounded by salmon-color; his hair fine, soft, and white; his complexion pinkish white; his tusks like long pearls; his ears like silver shields; his trunk like a comet's tail; his legs like the feet of the skies; his tread like the sound of thunder; his looks full of meditation; his expression full of tenderness; his voice the voice of a mighty warrior; and his bearing that of an illustrious monarch."

This is simply amusing to us, but it is only one side of Buddhism. Another, and a most interesting one, may be seen in a little book called "Why I am a Buddhist," lately published by Trübner. It contains an ingenious defence of Buddhism, which is said to have been inspired by the late king, and which gives us no low opinion of his intelligence.

The illustrations of this volume, which are copied from photographs, add greatly to its interest. Especially noteworthy are those of the Cambodian temples, probably the most curious ruins in the world.

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2. — *Römische Geschichte* von WILHELM IHNE. Erster Band. *Von der Gründung Rom's bis zum ersten punischen Kriege.* Zweiter Band. *Vom ersten punischen Kriege bis zum Ende des zweiten.* Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann. 1868–70. 8vo. pp. 483, 406.

It was quite common, a few years ago, to assert that the German mind was ill-fitted for historical composition; that its work was to collect and criticise materials for others to use. To be sure it did not